

a community called ...

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A GOOD OLD MAN

BY

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A GOOD OLD MAN.

NOBODY in all the country round was more respected than good old Edward Munns. Poor and quiet and humble, he was not the man to make much noise in the world. Yet every body was sorry when he died, and hundreds came flocking to the village when he was buried.

Talk as folks may about riches and titles, no amount of money could buy so much real sorrow as the parish showed for old Master Munns. From the squire down to the poor old pauper who lay in bed doubled with rheumatism, every body mourned for him, and had a kindly word. And the reason was as plain as the grief. As they turned from the grave the neighbors said to each other, "Well, if ever there was a good man in the world, that was old Master Munns." Even the rough set that gathered at the tap of the

Barleysheaf, and who did not know much about it, knew enough to be judges in this matter, and expressed their opinion with a decided shake of the head, "He wor a good old man wor Master Munns, that he wor!"

And after all they were likely to be right; for when a man has lived in the same village all his life-time, there is generally a good deal more truth in what the neighbors say of him than what is written on the tombstone. Master Munns had certainly gone in and out among them trying to do all the good he could. He himself thought that he could not do much, but for that very reason he tried all the more to do what he could. The sick always expected a call from him, and declared that he did more good "nor all the doctor's stuff." The dying would rather have a talk with him than with any one else. And no matter who got into trouble they always knew they could find a wise friend in Master Munns.

Now, reader, you are beginning to think within yourself, "Ah, here is one of your good folks like you always read about in tracts!

They might be as plentiful as blackberries if tracts and tombstones always told the truth. They are scarce enough, anyhow down our way, these folks that talk like angels. They seem to have lived in a queer sort of a world all to themselves, where every thing was made to order, and nothing ever went wrong; no east wind, no washing-days, no worries, no dust, and no sick headaches. It's a pity that we can never find any of them till they are dead ! ”

Well, Edward Munns was not one of that kind. He lived down in a long, straggling village in the fens of Cambridgeshire. If you want to find him you must turn in here at this little lane; and here in the smithy, with sweat on his forehead and the stains of his work, with the leathern apron girt about him, and his shirt sleeves rolled up over the brawny muscles, you will find Edward hard at it. In one hand are the tongs that grip the red-hot iron, while the other hand smites on the ringing anvil, making the sparks fly in a shower about him. Then the iron is thrust into the

fire again, and, keeping time with a verse or two of a hymn, he pulls away at the bellows, and the fire leaps up the chimney, roaring a rugged bass to the tune he sang. Here is a bit of real flesh and blood doing a real day's work, being in this like the rest of the villagers.

Nor had he always been one of the good folks. His father was a blacksmith, and Edward, the youngest son, was chosen to learn the trade. It had been well if his father had taught him nothing worse than the art and mystery of a smith. He was a drunkard, and young Edward was brought up in all the misery of a drunkard's home. What words can tell all that means? How that he who should win the children's bread keeps them in want and rags; how the father's house becomes only a place of hatred and cursing and cruel blows. Think of the wretched wife, and of the frightened children cowering away for shelter as the staggering steps are heard at the door. Thus young Edward was brought up. Little wonder that he bid fair to follow in the way in which he had been trained!

It was when he was about twenty-six years of age that there came the great change, and the beginning of a better life. God in his sovereign grace has many ways of bringing men to himself. But it is not often that the message is in such a singular way as it reached Edward Munns. His wife was very ill; he feared that she was dying. There were three little children to be cared for, and what would become of them without a mother? Sitting there alone, hearing only the steps that moved in the sick-room overhead, and feeling as if the dreadful shadow had already fallen on his home, all seemed so dreary that he was bowed down with utter misery—the burden was more than he could bear. There was no friend to help him; none that could comfort or strengthen him. There was, indeed, just such a Friend as he needed, One who could comfort and strengthen and bless; but of him Edward knew not.

He had sent that evening to the village shop for an ounce of tea. The paper in which it had been wrapped lay on the table close

beside him. For some time he sat looking very sadly into the fire, while the light glittered in the tears that gathered in his eyes. Now as he stirred he caught sight of this piece of paper. It was a page torn out of an old Bible. He picked it up carelessly, and holding it in the light of the fire, began to look over it, at first scarcely thinking of what he read.

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

“Ye shall find rest unto your souls;” the words took hold of him.

He read them again and again as they opened in their full meaning to his mind. He was burdened and heavy laden. Rest was what he longed for, and could not find in any thing about him. Was there one who could take off his burden and quiet all his trouble? “Ye shall find rest unto your souls”

—the word was plain and positive. And if others could find this rest, why should not he? Burying his face in his hands he groaned in his misery, “O that I knew where I might find him !”

So the good work began. He earnestly sought the Saviour, but for some time he sought him in the wrong way. He tried to make himself good enough to be saved. He turned from his sins and did every thing but the one thing needed. At last as he was going along the street one day the words occurred to him, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” The entrance of the word giveth light. In a moment he saw that Christ had borne his sins in his own body on the tree; and now he was able freely to save all that came to God by him.

In a moment he let go all his own doings, and confidently looked to Jesus as his Saviour. He trusted the crucified Saviour with all his heart. Then in a moment the burden fell from him. He had indeed come to Jesus, and now he found rest to his soul.

He gave himself at once to the work of the Lord. And first of all he began at home. By kindness, by firmness, and by the force of a good example he won his wife and children to Jesus. He began with much simplicity and fear to exhort his neighbors to turn to the Lord, feeling himself unworthy for so great a work, and yet with much earnest entreaty, knowing that he had a message from on high. Such was his humility that when he first preached he stood with but one foot in the pulpit, and the other on the stairs. It was from no love of oddity, still less was it an eccentricity to attract attention. Every body felt even then that Edward was incapable of any thing of this sort. To him it was so solemn a thing to stand as a representative of his great Lord that he dared not occupy the pulpit for some years after he began to preach. Of his preaching all bear loving testimony to this day. Simple, plain, homely, yet it was with "authority and not as the scribes." Men can't write sermons like those that Edward preached, or make them either.

They come only from the life of God in the soul. They are the utterance of the living Christ in the heart. His authority was seen in its results, and some are now useful workmen who were led to the Saviour by his preaching.

He was made a leader, and riveted the hearts of his members to himself by his gentleness and blameless life, while he directed them in their way by his wisdom and his own close walk with God. He became superintendent of the Sunday-school, and much good was done there.

A man who has felt the curse of intemperance as he had felt it in his father's house might well set himself to do all that he could against this mighty evil, and early in his religious life he helped to establish a temperance society in his native village, of which he was the president until his death. He carried the good work further by visiting villages in the neighborhood, and there encouraging the people to imitate so good an example. One of the greatest joys of his life was a Band of Hope

which he had formed in connection with the Sabbath-school; and during his last illness he watched the procession from his bedroom window, weeping for very joy that he should have been able to train so many in habits of temperance.

But most of all he sought to do good by the uprightness of his conduct; truth in every thing, love to every body, and, first and foremost, his duty to his Lord and Master—these were the sermons that did most good. Every body could listen to them whether they went to church or chapel. The deafest could hear them, and the plainest people could understand them. Nobody quarreled with the doctrine, and no sermons were half so convincing as these.

We have heard of a man who said to a Christian worker, "I really do believe in your religion now."

"How is that?" asked the worker, surprised, for he had often talked with the man and only met with abuse.

"Well, you see, it was like this: a few
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days ago an old customer that I had not seen for years came in and said that he wanted to pay a bill. I turned to the books, and found that it had been crossed out long ago as a bad debt. He told me that I had better cross it in again, for he had come to pay it. I stared in wonder. 'You may well wonder,' he said, laughing, 'but, you see, I heard a sermon the other day that set me a-thinking, and I've made up my mind to serve God. I thought I would begin by paying my old debts.'"

Men really do believe in religion that makes those who profess it always do the right thing. And they don't believe in it if it does not. Old Master Muuns felt that talk was an empty thing unless the life were right. This was one of his rules that did more good than any body can tell, and yet it is something that every body can do—he never spoke against any one. This is what he said: "If we can't do folks any good, we can keep from doing them any harm, that way."

So, useful and beloved, he lived and labored

on until he was seventy years of age. An accident which occurred as he was on his way to preach gave a shock to his system from which he never recovered. The old man said quietly, "I have had notice to quit. The old place is falling in, but 'I know whom I have believed.'

"My soul, through my Redeemer's care,
Saved from the second death I feel,
My eyes from tears of dark despair,
My feet from falling into hell.'"

Shortly afterward the dear old man passed away to his heavenly reward.

So he of the drunkard's home and the sad heart became a bright Christian, beloved of every body who knew him, leaving much good behind him, and then having an abundant entrance into the fullness of joy.

Now, reader, will you put alongside of this the sad, worthless, sinful life that might have been, and, but for the grace of God, that would have been?—a curse to itself, and a curse to all about it, leaving a track like a

fire-brand, all charred and blackened, and then going out into the utter darkness? Your life is hurrying away. What are you doing with it? Is it a round of working and eating and drinking and sleeping—never lifted up to the eternal and to the higher and only worthy life? What is the end of it all if there be no service of God and no training for eternity? We may “get on,” as it is called, but what is that if we don’t get up? Is it enough to satisfy us that we should live a life empty of all that blesses men, and then die without hope? going out with that terrible sentence from the Saviour’s lips, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Are you living for that? Basy from morning till night, anxious and careworn, and is it all to end in that? God forbid! He has redeemed our lives from destruction. Jesus is come to help us and to be our friend. He will help you. He gave himself for you. Seek him as your helper. Cast yourself upon him. Take him as your strength for all that is good

and worthy. And your life shall be a blessing to yourself and to those about you, shining as the path of the just, brighter and brighter until "the perfect day," when the Master shall say unto us, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

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